

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 CCO-00 SS-15 SSO-00 ISO-00 NSCE-00 NSC-05 /031 R

66613

DRAFTED BY: NEA:EWALKER

APPROVED BY: NEA:EWALKER

S/S-O:RELTZ

DIST: S/S, NSC/E

----- 064082

O 010043Z NOV 74 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 240139

TOSEC 448

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON

FOLLOWING REPEAT JERUSALEM 1886 ACTION DEPT INFO AMMAN BEIRUT

CAIRO DAMASCUS TEL AVIV OCT 30TH

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 1886

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, JO, IS, XF

SUBJ: WEST BANK REACTION TO RABAT CONFERENCE

REF: JERUSALEM 1406 AND 1439 OF DECEMBER 1973

SUMMARY. INITIAL WEST BANK/EAST JERUSALEM REACTION TO RABAT
SUMMIT IS ONE OF SATISFACTION MIXED WITH CONCERN THAT WAR MAY
HAVE BEEN BROUGHT CLOSER. RESPONSE REFLECTS MAJORITY SUPPORT FOR
PLO AND SEPARATE STATE THAT HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY EVIDENT SINCE
OCTOBER WAR BUT SEEMS TO HAVE EXISTED PREVIOUSLY AS WELL.
BANDWAGON EFFECT AND FEAR OF PLO RETRIBUTION HAVE CONTRIBUTED
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TO DEGREE OF SUPPORT BUT HAVE NOT BEEN DECISIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. WEST BANK/EAST JERUSALEM REACTION TO RABAT OUTCOME IS ONE OF SATISFACTION OVER VICTORY FOR PALESTINIAN CAUSE MINGLED WITH CONCERN THAT MORE IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL EFFECT MAY BE INCREASED THREAT OF WAR. THERE IS ALSO SOME RELIEF THAT THE ARAB SIDE HAS FINALLY GOTTEN TOGETHER AFTER PERIOD OF DISUNITY.

2. DEGREE OF SATISFACTION RANGES FROM UNBLEMISHED JOR OF NATION-ALISTS, SUCH AS PALESTINIAN NATIONAL FRONT MEMBERS, TO MORE MIXED FEELINGS OF BUSINESSMEN AND OTHERS WHO HAD HOPED THAT REAL ACCOMMODATION COULD BE REACHED BETWEEN JORDAN AND PLO. RAMALLAH MAYOR KHALAF, REPUTEDLY PNF MEMBER, WAS ENTHUSIASTIC AT DEVELOPMENT WHILE BETHLEHEM'S BUSINESSMAN-MAYOR FREIJ COUPLED HIS EXPRESSIONS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT MOST WEST BANKERS STILL WANT NORMAL RELATIONS WITH JORDAN ON BASIS OF EQUALITY BETWEEN STATES. LEADING ARABIC DAILY EL QUDS, IN OCT. 29 AND OCT. 30 EDITORIALS, STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF THE UNITY THAT HAD FINALLY BEEN ACHIEVED IN THE ARAB CAMP.

3. WEST BANK REACTION WAS PREDICTABLE. MAJORITY SUPPORT FOR PLO AND FOR SEPARATE STATE HAS BEEN CLEARLY EVIDENT SINCE OCTOBER WAR. THE ALGIERS CONFERENCE NAMING PLO AS PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE WAS PUBLICLY WELCOMED BY TWO OF MOST PROMINENT ARAB BODIES IN THE AREA: JERUSALEM ISLAMIC COUNCIL AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS COMMITTEE OF JERUSALEM (REFTELS). MORE RECENTLY, JUST PRIOR TO RABAT, PETITION WAS ADDRESSED TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY 182 PROMINENT WEST BANK AND GAZA PERSONALITIES UPPORTING PLO AND CONCEPT OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL AUTHORITY ON LIBERATED TERRITORIES.

4. THERE HAS BEEN SOME MENTION BY ISRAELIS OF "SILENT MAJORITY" ON WEST BANK THAT REALLY SUPPORTED JORDANIAN CONNECTION RATHER THAN PLO. WHILE SILENT MAJORITIES ARE BE DEFINITION HARD TO ASSESS, OUR INFORMATION INDICATES THAT SUPPORT FOR PLO AND SEPARATE STATE IS WIDELY SHARED. HARVARD STUDENT LIVING AND WORKING IN ARAB VILLAGE IN CONNECTION WITH HER PH.D HAS TOLD US THAT VILLAGERS HAD CLEAR PRO-PLO SYMPATHIES AND ACCEPTED IT AS REPRESENTING THEIR INTERESTS EVEN BEFORE OCTOBER WAR. LUTHERAN WORLD FEDER-ATION VILLAGE PROJECTS DIRECTOR, A U.S.-TRAINED ARAB ECONOMIST WHO HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH SCORES OF VILLAGES, HAS REPORTED

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UNIVERSAL SUPPORT THERE FOR PLO AND SEPARATE STATE. JUDITH COBURN, NEW TIMES CORRESPONDENT WHO HAS TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY ON WEST BANK IN RECENT WEEK, TELLS US SHE FOUND ALMOST UNIVERSAL SUPPORT FOR PLO AND SAID SHE "HAD TO DIG DEEP" TO FIND DIRECT SUPPORT FOR HUSSEIN EVEN AMONG TRADITIONAL PRO-HASHEMITES. LATER, SHE SAID, HAD FALLEN BACK TO A CALL FOR SELF-DETERMINATION THROUGH PLEBESCITE.

5. SOME OBSERVERS TENDED TO ASCRIBE EXPRESSIONS OF PLO SUPPORT TO FEAR OF PLO RETRIBUTION. FATAH HAS INDEED BURNED A FEW AUTOMOBILES AND THREATENING LETTERS HAVE FROM TIME TO TIME BEEN RECEIVED. THIS HAS NO DOUBT HAD ITS EFFECT. MORE IMPORTANT IN AUGMENTING ALREADY WIDE-SPREAD PLO SUPPORT, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN BANDWAGON EFFECT. MAYORS OF BOTH BETHLEHEM AND NEIGHBORING BEIT JALA COMMENTED SEPARATELY TO US THAT WEST BANKERS TEND TO GO WHERE THE STRENGTH LIES, AND IN RECENT WEEK SPARTICULARLY THE PLO HAS LOOKED LIKE A WINNER. NEITHER FACTOR HAS BEEN DECISIVE, HOWEVER. WE RECENTLY LEARNED OF A STUDY CONDUCTED UNDER HEBREW UNIVERSITY AUSPICES A FEW MONTHS PRIOR TO THE OCOBER WAR WHICH SHOWED THAT 80 PERCENT OF WEST BANK POLITICAL ELITE PREFERRED SEPARATE STATE AS IDEAL. AT THAT TIME 60 PERCENT ALSO SAID THEY WOULD ACCEPT ASSOCIATION WITH JORDAN AS PRACTICAL, REALIZALBE GOAL. WHAT HAPPENED FOLLOWING THE WAR, WE ASSUME, WAS THAT IDEAL PREFERENCE CAME TO SEEM MUCH MORE A REALIZABLE GOAL IN ITSELF.

6. WEST BANKERS, AWARE OF THEIR WEAKNESS AND VULNERABILITY, TNED TO VIEW NEW DEVELOPMENTS WARILY AND RABAT IS NO EXCEPTION. MANY WE SPOKE TO DOUBTED THAT ISRAEL WOULD NEOGTIATE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK EVEN WITH JORDAN IF IT KNEW AREA WAS TO BE HANDED OVER TO PALESTINIAN NATIONAL AUTHORITY. POSSIBILITY OF ISRAEL STARTING ANOTHER WAR WAS UPPERMOST IN THEIR MINDS. THEY LOOK TO THE UNITED STATES TO KEEP THINGS ON THE RAILS AND INFLUENCE ISRAEL IN THE DIRECTION OF PEACE.

7. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WEST BANK OPINION WILL ACTUALLY INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENTS VERY SLIGHTLY. WEST BANKERS COULD HAVE SLOWED OR EVEN ALTERED EVENTS ON THE MAIN ARAB STAGE IF THEY HAD BEEN OPPOSED TO THE PLO AND HAD SAID SO FORCEFULLY. THEY ARE NOT OPPOSED, HOWEVER, AND SAY NOTHING FORCEFULLY, SO THEY WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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CARRIED MORE OR LESS WILLINGLY ALONG THE TIDE THAT SEEMS TO MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF PALESTINIAN INDEPENDENCE OR, AS SOME FEAR, IN THE DIRECTION OF WAR.

8. WE NOTE, INCIDENTALLY, OCTOBER 30 JERUSALEM POST ARTICLE QUOTING NRP SOURCES TO EFFECT THAT ISRAELI CABINET AT ITS NOV 3 MEETING WILL AUTHORIZE ADDITIONAL SETTLEMENTS IN JERUSALEM AREA. IF IT DOES, WEST BANKERS WILL LIKELY INTERPRET IT AS REFLECTING NEW POST-RABAT POLICY. THIS INTERPRETATION, COUPLED WITH THEIR OWN INCREASED SENSE OF CONFIDENCE, MAY LEAD TO SHARPER ARAB REACTION THAN IN PAST.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WEST BANK, TOSEC 448, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, SUMMIT MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 NOV 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: smithrj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE240139
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: NEA:EWALKER
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740312-0299
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741179/aaaacorl.tel
Line Count: 167
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: JERUSALEM 1406 AND 1439 OF DECEMBER, 1973
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: smithrj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13-Aug-2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <14 MAR 2003 by smithrj>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WEST BANK REACTION TO RABAT CONFERENCE
TAGS: PFOR, JO, IS, XF, PLO
To: ISLAMABAD KABUL
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005